



News Release

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For Immediate Release

CALIFORNIA OFFERS COUNTRY'S BEST FOODIE VACATIONS

(SACRAMENTO, Calif.)— Not sure what culinary tourism is all about? According to the Portland-based International Culinary Tourism Association (ICTA), culinary tourism is a hot, fresh industry that offers destinations the opportunity to create a unique competitive advantage by promoting its local restaurants, wineries, cooking schools, farmers' markets and related festivals. In other words, food and drink are the attraction here and the primary reason travelers visit.

"The niche 'foodie' market is growing and spending significant money in our communities. It's no wonder that California regions are targeting them with special programs," said Executive Director Caroline Beteta of the California Travel and Tourism Commission (CTTC). "The ICTA reports that dining is consistently one of the top three favorite tourist activities, and the higher the food bill the more likely the patrons are tourists. Additional ICTA studies show there is a high correlation between these folks and those interested in museums, shows, shopping, music and film festivals and outdoor recreation."

But culinary tourism is not just for the four-star restaurants. Any destination that offers a unique, memorable gastronomic experience benefits from culinary tourism.

In Oxnard, part of the **Central Coast Region**, it's homegrown, juicy strawberries that have visitors coming back year after year to attend the California Strawberry Festival, held the third week of May, to taste the strawberry shortcake and even the strawberry pizza. Every September boasts Artichoke Fest in Castroville and Tomato Fest in Carmel, which features a tasting of 350 varieties of heirloom tomatoes. One of the country's best-known events, the Gilroy Garlic Festival in Gilroy, attracts more than 125,000 visitors every July. Santa Barbara County delivers a slice of its agricultural and culinary roots via the *Get Fresh on the American Riviera: Savor the Flavors of Santa Barbara* guide, which lists more than 150 culinary attractions and tours, including gourmet shops and maps. The area also provides a culinary Web site, www.santabarbarafresh.com, with themed culinary itineraries and culinary lodging packages.

In the **San Diego County Region**, San Diego's culinary community joins forces for San Diego Restaurant Week, January 7-12, 2007, to offer diners price-fixed menus at the region's top restaurants for just \$30 to \$40 per person. More than 125 restaurants will participate, including the Marine Room in La Jolla and JRDN in Pacific Beach. The San Diego Wine & Culinary Center in San Diego provides a tasting bar with wines by more than a dozen area wineries and knowledgeable staff to guide tasters, as well as cooking classes and a demonstration kitchen. Customer excursions are individually designed to include tours of working organic farms or behind-the-scenes visits at local wineries.

North Lake Tahoe, located in the **High Sierra Region**, had been catering to foodies and cultivating an upscale, unique and varied culinary scene for the past 21 years, when the Lake Tahoe Autumn Food & Wine Festival made its debut. This year, the event takes place September 28 to October 1 and features the creations of more than 30 restaurants, along with such activities as a lakefront grape stomp, winemaker dinners, wine tastings and demonstrations and a wine, walk and shop event. A number of North Shore restaurants, including PlumpJack in Olympic Valley and Moody's Bistro and Lounge in Truckee, offer wine dinners, chef's tables and cooking demonstrations throughout the year.

In the **Central Valley Region**, Fresno County has long capitalized on culinary tourism by offering special-themed food events, foodie group tour itinerary and the foodie agricultural trail. In Selma, it's the Selma Raisin Festival held the first weekend in May. The California Fig Advisory Board celebrates FigFest in Fresno every August, while peaches are the stars at Peach Party every July in Clovis. Culinary travelers will also enjoy the county's Farm to Fork Culinary Tour, where they'll discover unique farms and experience homegrown hospitality. For the ultimate agricultural adventure, the Fresno County Fruit Trail allows visitors to follow trails filled with orchards of succulent fruit from May through September. More than 40 farms participate throughout eastern Fresno County. In 2005, more than 40,000 pounds of asparagus were consumed at the annual Stockton Asparagus Festival in Stockton, held every April. From deep-fried to asparagus drinks, attendees enjoyed bushels of the vegetable.

Sponsored by the Newport Beach Restaurant Association, the Inaugural Newport Beach Restaurant Week in the **Orange County Region** is scheduled for January 21-25, 2007. Nearly 100 of the area's best eateries are expected to participate, such as 21 Oceanfront, The Arches Restaurant and Newport Landing Restaurant, by offering special three-course, price-fixed gourmet menus at \$12.95 for lunch and \$26.95 for dinner. Be it an haute Asian-fusion experience or a surf diner breakfast, Huntington Beach offers authentic cuisine all in one place, the Taste of Huntington Beach. Held every spring in Huntington Beach, the event features more than 50 restaurants and caterers, as well as 30 wineries and breweries.

One of the hottest trends among foodies is raw food and the Living Light Culinary Institute in Fort Bragg, part of the **North Coast Region**, celebrates this growing interest by offering hands-on certification courses in the art of gourmet raw cuisine for individuals, chefs and teachers. The institute was founded by master raw vegan chef Cherie Soria and caters to patrons from all over the world. Petaluma ranks as a foodie center with its award-winning cheeses, organic produce and free-range poultry. The Taste of Petaluma, scheduled for October 21, in historic Petaluma offers fine epicurean progressive meals with art, music and awards in the best of all settings. Another way to enjoy Petaluma's bounty, May through October, is with a Saturday stroll through the Petaluma Farmers Market in Walnut Park.

You can't talk about culinary tourism without including one of the country's culinary capitals, the **San Francisco Bay Area Region**. Food and wine abound as visitors flock to the area to enjoy the Santa Cruz Clam Chowder Cook Off and Festival in Santa Cruz. Scheduled for February 24, 2007, this event, in its 25th year, hosts teams of chowder chefs from all over the West Coast competing for the prestigious award of "Best Clam Chowder." Many visitors eat their way through the City by the Bay via the Local Tastes of the City Tours, a guided walking tour to local neighborhoods, such as North Beach and Chinatown. In the Napa Valley, Cooks and Books and Corks offers cooking classes, as well as hands-on cooking events for groups up to 20. Shop with the Chef series continues at the Cabrillo Farmers Market in Aptos on the first Saturday of the month, April through October. The program pairs a different local gourmet chef each month with farmer's market attendees as they embark on a culinary exploration. At the end of the tour, a cooking demonstration is conducted, featuring fresh produce selected during the outing. For organic eats, Marin County is known for its cutting-edge organic farming techniques. Locally-grown oysters and grass-fed beef are found on the menu at many of Marin's top restaurants. The area's Marin Civic Center Farmers' Market was selected by *Bon Appetit* as one of the top ten markets in the nation. The Napa Valley Mustard Festival, January 27 to March 31, 2007, offers a full palette of food, wine and culture throughout the world-famous Napa Valley grape-growing region. If there's any doubt that culinary tourism is an obsession with many visitors, visit COPIA: The American Center for Food Wine and the Arts' Web site at www.copia.org/confessions for their recent "Confessions of a Foodie" advertising campaign. Winners and their confessions were posted last month.

In celebration of the luscious red crustacean, Redondo Beach, in the **Los Angeles County Region**, will host the 11th Annual Original Redondo Beach Lobster Festival September 22-24. Located at the Redondo Beach Seaside Lagoon in the Redondo Beach King Harbor, attendees will enjoy 1.25 to 2.5-pound Maine lobster meals, festival t-shirt, as well as kids' carnival rides and entertainment. Award-winning chefs host a new series of culinary classes at the four-diamond Pechanga Resort & Casino in Temecula located in the **Inland Empire Region**. Experienced and novice participants will enjoy "What's New in Europe," "Food for the Buffet" and "Petit Fours

and Canapés” seminars. The Art of Food and Wine in Palm Desert, part of the **Desert Region**, offers everything from cooking and tasting to grilling and golfing November 9-12 in Palm Desert.

The **Shasta Cascade Region** is home to the Sierra Oro Farm Trail Passport Weekend, sponsored by the Butte County Farm Bureau, September 30 to October 1. Visitors can tour Butte County specialty farms for wine tasting and food sampling. Apple aficionados can immerse themselves in the world of apples at the Sierra Apple Festival in Sonora, located in the **Gold Country Region**, September 30. Foodies return annually for the fresh apples, homemade jellies, syrups and apple butter – some stirred for 12 hours. Another not-to-be-missed foodie event is the 19th Annual Eggplant Festival in Loomis, which offers everything from eggplant Parmesan to eggplant pakora. This year’s event is scheduled for October 7.

The CTTC is a non-profit organization with a mission to develop and maintain marketing programs - in partnership with the state's travel industry - that keep California top-of-mind as a premier travel destination. California is currently the number one travel destination in the country. According to the CTTC, travel and tourism expenditures total \$88.1 billion annually in California, support jobs for 911,800 Californians and generate \$5.3 billion in state and local tax revenues. For more information about the CTTC and for a free California vacation packet, go to www.visitcalifornia.com.

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